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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: CROSS RIVER STATE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
IGNORES THE POOREST

Classified By: Consul General Donna Blair, Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C) Summary. Executive Director of the NGO Global Peace Development, Ebruke Esike, told PolOff on January 13 that the current development strategy of Cross River State Governor Liyel Imoke (PDP) fails to deliver development to the poorest of the poor. Imoke seeks to develop tourism as the engine for development in Cross River State and is reported to have spent 2 billion Naira (USG 13.3 million) on the most recent Carnival in Calabar, however, the vast majority of inhabitants of Cross Rivers live in rural communities without fundamental sanitation, drinking water, electricity, schools or medical services. Esike says that all development that has taken place to date has been done by the residents aided by international organizations, notably UNICEF and the EU, not by the state government. Esike compared Calabar to Abuja, claiming it was an artificial island of apparent development in a sea of desperate poverty. Esike reported that the corruption of state officials was so blatant that the population is becoming angry; he advocates educating people about their rights and providing skills-training for self-government. While not doubting what Esike reported of conditions today, there are indications that the Imoke government is committed to serious development and has instituted key programs to address the state of affairs in rural areas. End Summary.

Calabar a "Mini-Abuja" in a Sea of Desperate Poverty

12. (C) On January 13, PolOff met with the Executive Director, Ebruke Esike, and Program Coordinator Calabar, Grace Ikpe, of Global Peace Development, an NGO actively involved in development and democratization projects throughout the Niger Delta. Global Peace Development has been bringing development to rural communities in the Niger Delta for the last five years with funding from UNICEF, the EU and the Ambassador's Self-Help Program. The focus of recent work has been providing fundamental training in basic hygiene to rural communities where there are no wells, water treatment or latrines. Another focus in cooperation with the EU is budget transparency and responsiveness at the Local Government Area level. While the State government sees tourism as the engine of development and seeks to make Cross River a tourist destination with the Tinapa Free Trade Zone, the Obudu Ranch and the Carnival in Calabar, Ikpe stressed that most of the people of Cross River State live in rural communities with no functioning schools or health services, no electricity, no potable water and no sanitation facilities. Esike and Ikpe

deplored the state government's expenditure on fostering tourism in the state, in particular the large sums (allegedly 2 billion Naira or over USD 13 million) for the month-long Carnival in Calabar, in face of the glaring need for fundamental development and services at the local level. Esike described Calabar as a "mini-Abuja," which creates the illusion of development and prosperity in Cross River State while the vast majority of the state's inhabitants live in abject poverty.

Corruption Fuels Anger

¶3. (C) According to Esike any funds funneled through the institutions of government disappear and fees are charged even for services that are supposed to be provided to residents free of charge. He cited the example of mosquito netting contributed by international donors for free distribution which he said were instead sold to the people, often at excessive prices, by state authorities. Esike said that there was a growing mood of anger among the rural people, and if an election were held today that no one would bother to turn out. Esike argued that it is important for civil activists to go personally to the communities and talk to people face-to-face about their rights. He also stressed that even among local government officials with the will to make a positive contribution to development there is often a lack of necessary skills.

¶4. (C) Comment: While there is no reason to doubt the validity of Esike's description of the current level of development in rural communities, other contacts suggest that the Imoke government is sincerely attempting to address the development issues described and that measurable progress may be made in the next few years. Imoke inherited from his predecessor, Donald Duke, a number of poorly planned, large-scale projects such as the Free Trade Zone at Tinapa, which rightly generate indignation among development experts for squandering resources. However, Imoke appears to have shifted his focus from grandiose projects to maintenance and grass-roots projects (see Septel) including trying to find a way to make Tinapa more viable. End Comment.

¶5. (U) This cable was cleared by Embassy Abuja.

BLAIR